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EPA completes cleanup at Mahoningside plant

By **JOE LAWLOR**
Tribune Chronicle

WARREN - Workers are hauling out the final 240 tons of contaminated soil this week at the former Mahoningside Generating Plant, which means the cleanup is complete and the site soon will be ready for development.

The U.S. EPA took over the site last year when tests revealed soil contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs. By January, further testing revealed that the contamination was contained to a limited area at the site and a small section of the Mahoning River. City officials want to sell the property to a private developer.

Jim Augustyn, EPA on-site coordinator at the Tod Avenue N.W. site, said the EPA finished its work on time.

He said the agency is happy they were able to help the city which was in charge of the cleanup after Warren ran out of money in 2000. Contractor McCabe Engineering discovered the PCBs in 2000, and the city was unable to pay for removing the contaminated material.

The EPA was authorized to spend \$725,000 on the cleanup, although final cost figures were not available Wednesday.

"The main reason we stepped in was the city asked us to take over," Augustyn said.

EPA officials also became concerned because the PCBs, a known carcinogen, were found in high concentrations in the riverbank and the basement of the turn-of-the-century power plant. An area of about 3,000 square feet in the basement and about 20 cubic yards of the river were the source of the problem.

Augustyn said the site was termed "critical," because of the potential PCB threat to the surrounding environment.

As part of the final cleanup, workers dredged 40 cubic yards from the Mahoning River where the contamination was found. Workers also will fill in basement trenches with gravel and erect an orange barrier around the site.

Kevin Kralj, the city's community development director, said even after the physical cleanup is finished, paperwork has to be completed by the Ohio EPA. The EPA and city have to sign a "covenant not to sue," which means the property can't be sold

until the EPA agrees not to sue the property owners.

"I'm very happy the EPA stepped forward to help, but we still have lots of work to do," Kralj said.

He said the covenant is not expected to be signed until October, and the city also has to find money for final site preparation before it is sold. Kralj said the site preparation is expected to cost about \$185,000 to \$400,000.

Michael D. Keys, executive director of Warren Redevelopment and Planning Corp., said it is OK to wait nine months or longer before selling the property. He said by then, the Riverwalk downtown improvement project will be under way, and the Mahoningside site could be more valuable.

"I don't think we should just sell the property on a first-come, first-served basis," Keys said. "I really see that whole area as part of the city's tourism attractions, from the Packard museum, to the Riverwalk, to maybe a nice restaurant on the Mahoningside property."

Keys said he envisions the Riverwalk promenade tying into the Mahoningside property. The Riverwalk project includes construction of Stephen Foster Promenade, an amphitheater and restoration of the historic Kinsman House and Land Grant Office.

"I'm ready to put a big "FOR SALE "sign up, and we can start marketing it," Keys said.

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